



Jones, E. T. (2010, Dec 3). William Walton's suit for the searchership of Bristol, July 1597. Unpublished. <http://hdl.handle.net/1983/1697>

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Evan T. Jones (ed.), 'William Walton's suit for the searchership of Bristol, July 1597' (University of Bristol, ROSE, 2010)¹

Letter: William Walton to Robert Cecil, 4 July 1597²

To the worshippingfulle mr
John Leye equire
geve these³

Worshipfull After most hartiest maner I commend me unto you *with* thanks for all your corteseis & prayer for your felycytye &c. Sertefyinge you one William Colston⁴ served hear in brystoll the offyce of serchershipp:⁵ & for his mysbehaviour therin is dysmysed & his patent taken from hem: it is the queens gyft & graunted by patente forth of her chancery & now in her hand Colston bought the offyce of one Mr Ley⁶ *which* before served that offyce heare & gave for the same 300 li. pleaseth you to deall *with* Sir Henry Ley⁷ or by your self or any other to bege the same of the queene in my name that I may have that graunt as Colston had it: I will geve you good payment 300 li for your paynes: yf *you* please to deall therin you must do it *forthwith* for sondry this day is ryd hear hence to be suters to my Lord Tresorer for his good will for the offyce. I have don her magestye very good service sondry tymes & never had any recompence. yf ned be (although no sercher ever gave sherties) I will geve good sherties⁸ for my good behaviour in the offyce: The wydow is yett a clear woman⁹ & worth the sewinge¹⁰ & another since fallen aclothiers wydo worth som 3000 poundes.¹¹

¹ I would like to thank Lord Salisbury for giving me permission to publish these letters. I also thank Robin Harcourt Williams (Hatfield House Library) and Margaret Condon (University of Bristol) for their advice and assistance on the transcription. Summaries of the two letters can be found in: Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury*, VII, (London, 1899), pp. 288-9, 293. The following conventions were employed when transcribing these documents: the line spacing, spelling, capitalization and punctuation follow the manuscript; reconstructions of suspensions are in italics, editorial comments are in squared brackets.

² Hatfield House Library, CP53/21.

³ The address is on the verso of the document. John Lee is mentioned here because Walton's brother had apparently been instructed to give Lee the petition. The brother was then take to Walton's letter to Robert Cecil, along with Lee's letter of recommendation: CP53/18.

⁴ William Colston was searcher of Bristol by 29 Sept 1591: TNA E190/1131/1.

⁵ A searcher was a senior customs officer, responsible for ensuring that vessels did not lade or unlade uncustomed goods while in the jurisdiction of his port. Like customers and controllers, searchers were appointed by letters patent.

⁶ John Lee / Ley was searcher of Bristol in the 1580s: TNA E 134/24Eliz/East11; E 134/26Eliz/Hil1.

⁷ Sir Henry Lee of Quarrendon, Buckinghamshire, Queen's Champion, d. Feb 1611.

⁸ 'sherties': sureties. A surety is a form of 'security' in which a third party pledges himself financially for the behaviour of the principal. In this case, those offering surety would make themselves financially liable, up to a pre-agreed sum, if Walton did not behave properly while in office.

⁹ In this context 'clear' could be read as either 'fair / attractive' or 'unencumbered / unattached': *OED*.

¹⁰ 'sewinge': suing – i.e. paying suit to.

¹¹ This sentence appears to represent a break from the previous subject. If so it presumably eludes to some previous correspondence: Walton informing Robert Cecil of the continued availability of one marriageable widow and the more

what good I or my frendes may do for
 your good: be you assured it shalbe performed
 with all care: And so I take my leve
 & commit you to the holy keaping of the allmyghtye
 Brystoll the iiijth day of July 1597 anno

Your Lovinge ffrend to commaund

[Signed] William Walton¹²

*Letter: John Lee to Robert Cecil, 8 July 1597*¹³

To the Right Honorable
 Sir Robert Cissill knight
 Principall Secreatarye
 to her majestie. /

[Docketed]¹⁴

8. July. 1597

M^r John Lee, to my Master
 in favour of one Walton, to be
 preferred to the serchership
 of Bristoll

Right honorable this enclosed was written unto me from Bristowe by ane honest man a ffrende of myne *which* I have presumed thoughe yt be a great deale more then becommeth me to doe; most humblie beseachinge *your* honor to pardon my boldnes to send to *your* honor by this bearer his Brother and in all humblenes I beseach *your* honor geve me leave to entreat *your* honorable furtherance to my good lord *your* ffather towchinge the sute he maketh for the Sherchershipp of Bristowe beinge nowe voyde; he ys a man of very honest Carriadge and such a one as hath served her majestie in very good sorte of his owne charge as ys well knowne to my lord Admirall as I am enformed.¹⁵ the honest offer he maketh in his *lettre* towchinge the puttinge in of Suerties *which* hath not bin done heretofore maketh me the more to presume to commende his sute to *your* honor. Assuringe you that I dare gage my poore credditt and honestie *which* ys the greatest parte of the litle wealth I have for the performinge of the other offer he mentioneth in his *lettre* to be presently payd upon the obteyninge of the place to any such of better desert as my good lord *your* ffather or *your* honor shall thinke mete to bestowe the same upon. And soe with my daylie prayer to allmightie god for the continuance of *your* health with daylie encrease of honor I most humblie leave you to the tuicion of thallmyghtie

Your honors most humblie allwayes att
 comaundement./

[Signed] Jhon Lee¹⁶

recent availability of a clothier's widow. Cecil might have been expected to be interested in such matters because Lord Burghley, as Master of the Court of Wards, was responsible for issuing licences for widow's marriages: J. Hurstfield, 'Lord Burghley as Master of the Court of Wards, 1561-98', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* Fourth Series, Vol. 31, (1949), p. 99. In addition, Cecil might have been interested in rich widows as potential spouses for his clients.

¹² William Walton was a successful privateer with interests in Bristol and Weymouth. He was also mayor of Weymouth in 1597: K. R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering* (CUP, 1964), pp. 140-5.

¹³ Hatfield House Library, CP53/18.

¹⁴ The address and docket are on the verso. The docket would have been added by have been added by one of Cecil's secretaries, which indicates that the letter was written between 4-8 July 1597.

¹⁵ This is presumably a reference to William Walton's services as a privateer over the previous ten years.

¹⁶ John Lee had been searcher of Bristol during the 1480s, before selling the office to William Colston: TNA:PRO E 134/24Eliz/East11; E 134/26Eliz/Hil1, E 133/6/809; Hatfield House Library, CP53/21.